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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 001521

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SUBJECT: THAILAND POLITICAL UPDATE MARCH 10:

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Suspicions fall on a rogue element of the military or police in the case of the small explosion at a privy councilor's house. Boycotting parties are challenging the suspicious candidates they claim have been paid by TRT to run. Civil servants in the tax department are surreptitiously checking the PM's tax records looking for transgressions to leak to the opposition. Planning for the next round of demonstrations continues. End summary.

BOMBING AT PRIVY COUNCILOR'S HOUSE -- CUI BONO?

12. (C) Most contacts, including those in the military, seem to believe that rogue military or police officers were behind the small explosion at the house of revered Privy Councilor Prem Tinsulanonda on Thursday. The argument is that some elements in the military who support PM Thaksin believe that the perception of dangerous disorder would give the military an excuse to intervene, shut down the opposition protests, and appeal to the King to endorse the April 2 elections and therefore support Thaksin. Several opposition politicians told us on March 10 that the act could be an effort by some on the government side to justify imposition of the Emergency Decree that was adopted last year, and so far been applied only in the South. (Comment: we still see no evidence of planned military intervention. However, tensions are increasing and this mysterious bombing certainly raises everyone's level of concern. End comment.)

THAI RAK THAI WORKING HARD

13. (C) During lunch on March 10, opposition Chart Thai (CT) party MP (and son of Chart Thai leader Barnharn Silpa-archa) Warawut Silpa-archa, said that there are six candidates for his constituency seat in Suphan Buri, in contrast to his one opponent in last year's election. Warawut complained that these individuals were obviously ringers hired by the TRT to furnish an opposition for its candidate, due to the national opposition parties' boycott of the elections. (See Bangkok 1475 for an explanation of why it is so important for TRT to have at least one opposition candidate in constituencies where it is weakest.) Warawut said that despite the susceptibility of these candidates to legal challenge he expects that Thaksin will manipulate the election process successfully and the full 500 seat Parliament will convene within 30 days of the polls as constitutionally mandated. (Warawut claimed that one candidate slipped and admitted to a TV interviewer that he had backdated party membership document. The press is full of similar colorful stories.) Warawut also said that some of his pals in TRT are unhappy with the PM, since he is jeopardizing the whole party for his personal interests.

CIVIL SERVICE OUT TO GET THAKSIN?

14. (C) A high-ranking civil servant in the Ministry of Finance told us that the employees in the Revenue Department were busy combing through Thaksin's tax records looking for dirt to leak to the opposition. He also confirmed that some civil servants were wearing black on designated days to show their opposition to the PM. Contacts in the MFA has also confirmed that some employees there are participating in this action.

DEMONSTRATION ISSUES

15. (C) A contact in the military who is also Chairman of the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority said he was ordered to have several thousand buses in standby mode during the upcoming demonstrations. These are to rapidly evacuate a massive crowd from the city center if the situation deteriorates. He told us he had several thousand bus drivers with their buses standing by throughout last weekend. No one had made allowances for the overtime pay this extra effort would require, so he paid for them out of his "Chairman's Fund" of 500,000 baht.

